THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF PETROLEUM AND NATURAL GAS (SHRI SANTOSH GANGWAR): (a) and (b) Public Sector Oil Marketing Companies (OMCs) are marketing 5 kg small gas LPG cylinders for domestic purpose in rural and hilly areas, as per the scheme approved by the Government for low income group customers. OMCs have not reported any illegal sale of small gas cylinders.

Further, LPG distributors of OMCs are under strict instructions to supply the cylinders of right quantity and quality to their customers. The Oil Company Officials carry out random checks at distributors' godown, delivery point as well as enroute to ensure that no pilferage takes place. On the establishment of complaint of supply of under-weight cylinders to customers, action against erring distributors is taken in terms of Marketing Discipline Guidelines and/or Distributionship Agreement.

Delay in exploration of oil and gas in North-Eastern Region

1339. SHRI KARNENDU BHATTACHARJEE: Will the Minister of PETROLEUM AND NATURAL GAS be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that the exploration of oil and natural gas in the North-Eastern Region has recently received a set-back;

(b) if so, the details thereof and the reasons therefor; and

(c) the steps proposed to be taken to remove the hurdles in the way of fast exploration of oil in the region?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF PETROLEUM AND NATURAL GAS (SHRI SANTOSH GANGWAR): (a) to (c) There has been no recent set-back in the exploration of hydrocarbons in North-Eastern Region. Appropriate measures as warranted by the prevalent situation in the region have been taken.

Special dividends by oil companies

1340. SHRI PRITHVIRAJ CHAVAN: Will the Minister of PETROLEUM AND NATURAL GAS be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that Government have asked the Public Sector Oil companies to declare special dividends of about Rs. 6,000 crore in the current financial year to augment the revenue shortfall:

(b) whether these oil companies have complained about this cash outflow as it will adversely affect their development plans; and

(c) if so, what is Government's reaction thereto?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF PETROLEUM AND NATURAL GAS (SHRI SANTOSH GANGWAR): (a) to (c) No, Sir. The Oil PSUs under the control of Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas have paid to the Central Government an interim dividend of Rs. 2687.42 crores during the current year. The interim dividend paid by oil PSUs came out of their expected higher profits during 2002-03 and therefore will not affect their developmental plans. No complaint has been received by Government from these oil PSUs in this regard.

Purchase of Talisman Greater NILE by ONGC Videsh

1341. SHRI SANJAY NIRUPAM: Will the Minister of PETROLEUM AND NATURAL GAS be pleased to state:

(a) whether ONGC Videsh Limited has any plan or has purchased 'Talisman Greater Nile BV' a subsidiary of Talisman Energy Inc.; and

(b) if so, the reasons therefor and the financial details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF PETROLEUM AND NATURAL GAS (SHRI SANTOSH GANGWAR): (a) and (b) ONGC Videsh Ltd. (OVL), the wholly owned subsidiary of Oil and Natural Gas Corporation Ltd. (ONGC), signed the Purchase and Sale Agreement with Talisman Energy Inc. (TLM), Canada on 30th October, 2002 for buying the 25% stake of latter in Greater Nile Oil Project (GNOP), Sudan, subject to consent from the Government of Sudan and the other Consortium Members, namely China National Petroleum Company (CNPC), China, Petronas, Malaysia, and Sudapet, Sudan, as well as waiver of the pre-emption rights by CNPC and Petronas.

In the process of buying the 25% stake in the GNOP at an investment not exceeding US $750 Million (Rs. 3,675 crores, approx.), OVL would acquire from TLM, 1005 shares of the "Talisman Greater Nile B.V.", a subsidiary of TLM through whom the 25% stake in GNOP is held by TLM.